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C O N F I D E N T I A L BERN 001462

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TAGS: PHUM PTER MOPS IS

SUBJECT: UNHRC SPECIAL SESSION ON LEBANON: SWISS AMBIVALENT

REF: SECSTATE 130145

Classified By: Poloff Eric Lundberg, Reasons 1.4 b/d

1.(C) Swiss officials say they are unconvinced of the advisability of holding a special session of the UN Human Rights Council this week, but view it as a fait accompli, given the Chair's agreement to schedule the session for August 10. Poloff spoke to Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs deputy IO chief Jean-Francois Paroz several times on August 8 and 9 to discourage Swiss support for a special session and to encourage Western Group solidarity in the event that the session is unavoidable. Paroz initially on August 8 described the Swiss position as ambivalent. On the one hand, the human suffering in Lebanon and Israel certainly merited international attention, he said. On the other hand, Bern was sensitive to the mandate of Article 12 of the UN Charter for the UN General Assembly not to take up simultaneously matters being addressed in the UN Security Council. Paroz also conceded Poloff's point that yet another session where countries roundly criticize Israel while only tepidly touching on Hezbollah's role would not reflect well on the new Human Rights Council.

2.(C) In a follow-up conversation on August 9, Paroz noted that the special session had been scheduled for the next day, August 10, after 16 countries (primarily OIC members, plus Russia, China, and South Africa) had signed a petition and (to Paroz surprise) CHR Chairman Luis Alfonso de Alba had agreed to hold it. Paroz added that "most CHR members" had apparently convinced themselves that the special session would not violate Article 12, since it would deal only with human rights, while the UNSC dealt with peace and security. (Note: Paroz added that he hoped UN members would take up a discussion on the scope of Article 12 for future contingencies. End note.)

3.(C) Paroz reiterated Swiss hopes for a balanced debate and resolution. Reacting to Poloff's skepticism, Paroz said that he believed two possible positive outcomes of a special session could be an arrangement for humanitarian corridors and a UN fact-finding mission. Paroz said that he recognized the danger of "automaticity" with the CHR taking up the Middle East situation every time violence flared. He added that Switzerland, as the self-perceived parent of the CHR, was very interested in seeing it develop into a constructive body.

Israeli Embassy Reaction

4.(C) Israeli Embassy officer Uri Rothman also called to confer on developments in Geneva. Poloff shared the gist of

his conversation with Paroz. Rothman reported that he had detected similar ambivalence from DFA Near East chief Livia Leu, but did not know the state of play in Geneva. Rothman expressed dismay that the Israeli Embassy's efforts to share information with the media had been dismissed as propaganda by the Swiss publication "Tages Anzeiger," while the media was swallowing whole information coming from Arab stringers in Lebanon. Poloff commiserated with Rothman, but noted the fact that some publications had at least taken up the story of the doctored Reuters photos - a fraud only exposed because of Internet blogs.

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